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Intercultural, interreligious and intercivilizational dialogue

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides an overview of the activities carried out by the main United Nations entities in the field of dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions. The report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 65/138, covers a range of topics, including the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, the fourth Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, communication, awareness-raising and educational activities, to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue, as well as a rights-based approach to the issue. It also provides the outcome of the consultations carried out on the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade on interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 65/138, entitled "Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace". It sets out the main activities carried out by the United Nations system in support of dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions since the adoption of the resolution. The report also provides information on the outcome of the consultations carried out by the Secretariat, in coordination with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), on the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, pursuant to the same resolution.

2. Since the adoption of the resolution, a number of initiatives have been carried out by the United Nations system, Member States and civil society organizations. UNESCO continues to be the main institution dealing with all culture-related issues on a large scale within the United Nation system. The United Nation Alliance of Civilizations also organizes high-profile events on the issues. The contributions of United Nations entities are therefore of particular relevance to the present report and are highlighted herein.

3. The report also comprises contributions from the work of other United Nations entities, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Public Information. The contributions are set out in the report according to the main focus of the activities carried out.

II. Lessons learned from the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures and future steps by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

4. The General Assembly designated UNESCO to be the lead agency of the United Nations system for the 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, capitalizing on its invaluable experience of more than 60 years in advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples. The lessons learned by UNESCO from the International Year are set out below.

5. Coinciding with the conclusion the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures provided a unique opportunity for the United Nations system to reaffirm its fundamental commitment to the plurality of humanity, in which cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue are mutually reinforcing and whose implications drive their relevant programmes. The International Year thus served as a firm foundation to give fresh impetus to the theme of dialogue among cultures.

6. The main objective of the International Year was to help to dissipate any confusion stemming from ignorance, prejudice and exclusion that creates tension,

insecurity, violence or conflict. The task was to demonstrate the benefits of cultural diversity by acknowledging the importance of the exchanges between cultures and the ties forged between them since the dawn of humanity. The ultimate aim was to integrate the principles of dialogue into policies at all levels in order to foster an environment conducive to the rapprochement of cultures.

7. The process was facilitated by a number of initiatives aimed at achieving the same objective as those of the preceding decade. Beyond their principal value as part of a given year, all initiatives paved the way by familiarizing many decision makers and citizens with the implications of the rapprochement of cultures. The parallel celebrations of other international years and World Days enabled a considerable deepening and convergence of the themes and questions addressed.

8. The action plan for the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures included four main themes, chosen to facilitate ownership of the Year by Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations: (a) promoting reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity; (b) building a framework for commonly shared values; (c) strengthening quality education and the building of intercultural competences; and (d) fostering dialogue for sustainable development. The themes were based on the cardinal principle of the equal dignity of all cultures, mutual respect and the strengthening of international cooperation for lasting peace.

9. The specific activities considered by Member States and various partners, including the Alliance of Civilizations and civil society stakeholders, are available from http://www.unesco.org/culture/dialogue/2010iyrc/home. The activities focused on the following:

(a) Providing greater opportunities for research, meetings, public debates, exhibitions, fairs and festivals and making use of new technologies that specifically foster linguistic diversity and translation;

(b) Promoting the role of creativity, which is a fundamental attribute of innovation, by stressing the individualities and similarities of societies and, in that regard, enhancing the promotion of an integrated vision of all aspects of cultural heritage as a bearer of history and identity that must be preserved, a resource and engine of sustainable development and a tool for intercultural dialogue, which includes interreligious dialogue;

(c) Improving access to formal and non-formal education, with an emphasis on quality education for all, human rights education, cultural diversity, gender equality and the integration of marginalized groups, and the strengthening of South-South and North-South inter-university cooperation, particularly by creating sites of excellence and innovation;

(d) The contributions of the media and of new information and communications technology to changing the perceptions of different cultures and religions through, inter alia, the promotion of dialogue on the Internet where numerous cultural and linguistic expressions can be circulated and shared; or the co-production of dialogues between media professionals from different cultures, particularly on sensitive issues;

(e) Recognizing and respecting knowledge, including traditional knowledge systems and the knowledge of indigenous peoples, which contribute to sustainable

development, the promotion of human rights, philosophy and intercultural dialogue, with particular emphasis on fighting racism and discrimination and on the culture of peace and democracy.

10. It is in that spirit that the numerous suggestions, initiatives and formulations of possible partnerships (almost 1,000 projects in all) succeeded in achieving the global key objectives of the Year. A large number of projects were launched and tens of thousands of people worldwide participated in the exercise. The International Year was instrumental in building awareness among a wide, diverse and particularly young audience of the virtuous cycle of cultural diversity and its corollary, intercultural dialogue, as part of processes of rapprochement. It is hoped that the Year demonstrably helped to change attitudes, mindsets, behaviours and habits.

11. A particular conclusion to emerge from the activities was that, in the new, rapidly changing international landscape, it is necessary to focus increasingly on the close links between cultural diversity, dialogue, development, security and peace. Those five interdependent notions should be reconsidered in order to develop new approaches, namely, that culture be based on its rich diversity and that dialogue focus on the potential of material and symbolic diversity to achieve sustained peace, in view of the complexity of combining diversity, uniqueness and universality in a globalized world. Dialogue can only be effective if basic prerequisites are met, namely equality, justice, poverty reduction and respect for human rights.

12. Two persistent issues have arisen: (a) in the context of globalization, determining the new arguments in favour of a strong commitment by States and civil society to creating development and mutual understanding on the basis of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; and (b) determining the new choices and strategies needed in terms of public policies? In answering those questions, the three challenges that must be tackled as a priority are detailed below.

13. In-depth structural reforms must be supported in order to show, through local and international experiences, that no culture is monolithic, but is instead made up of exchanges and interactions, and that each culture offers a fertile ground for renewed creation. Prior understanding of the diversity inherent in one's own culture is crucial to better understanding cultural diversity worldwide. However, in the more specific case of interreligious dialogue, which is a component of the wider intercultural dialogue, religious and non-religious beliefs and convictions must be better known and understood in order to avoid ignorance and harmful simplistic views.

14. Support must be provided for practical measures that mobilize not only States but also civil society, including a demarcation of the roles of States and local governments. That entails building capacities, opportunities and frameworks for cooperation among various players in order to reach not only those who are already committed to dialogue but, above all, those who do not yet feel concerned. The responsibility for engaging in dialogue is shared by such stakeholders as intellectuals, artists and opinion-makers (including media professionals and religious and youth leaders), who have a major role to play. The urgent need for linkages among the global, regional and local levels to promote such vital but fragile dialogue must be stressed.

15. The added value of dialogue among and within societies is only valid on the basis of the experiences and memories of individuals and social groups. It must be

taken into consideration that dialogue involves individuals' cognitive skills, imagination, sensibilities and emotions. That is particularly true in the new digital landscape, where the social media brings people face to face with cultural and religious practices that they cannot interpret. The role of formal and non-formal education thus becomes crucial since it not only transmits knowledge but also offers critical and objective perspectives on all transmitted content.

16. In the shifting international context, UNESCO continues to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue in accordance with its original mandate and with one of the overarching objectives of the organization's medium-term strategy for 2008-2013, related to foster cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and a culture of peace. Against that backdrop, UNESCO is currently developing a new intersectional and interdisciplinary programme of action for a culture of peace and non-violence, which is expected to be adopted by the organization at the thirty-sixth session of its General Conference (to be held in October and November 2011. The main objectives of the programme are as follows:

(a) To improve the global understanding and deconstruct preconceived ideas, by developing a global consciousness on thinking and learning for the twenty-first century, taking into account the emergence of a global civic space with young men and women as relevant actors;

(b) To develop a concept- and programme-based approach that uses suitable and convincing language to present new arguments in favour of a strong commitment by States and civil society to nurture "everyday peace" in a social environment that encourages civic engagement and dialogue within and among cultures and communities, while improving the understanding of the root causes of violence;

(c) To develop a common global curriculum on humanism and intercultural competencies that promote the "cardinal virtues" of temperance, courage, wisdom and justice, as well as empathy, hospitality, the harmonious coexistence and appreciation of diversity and respect for the equal rights of men and women, in order to spur critical and creative thinking among young people through formal and non-formal education, as well as through information and communications technology and the social media;

(d) To raise awareness about violence and the importance of investing in the civic engagement of young people in order to build participative societies; the development of critical thinking; the eradication of violence against women; the strengthening of democratic culture and fundamental freedoms; and measures to combat all forms of discrimination and xenophobia.

17. UNESCO is also preparing to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, on 2 November 2011, during the above-mentioned session of the General Conference, and on the occasion of the fourth annual forum of the Alliance of Civilizations. Special attention will be paid to the aspirations of the Declaration, including the promotion of the fruitful diversity of cultures, the free flow of ideas by word and image, the right to individual expression and creativity, the strengthening of international solidarity through innovative partnerships and the increased involvement of civil society to achieve harmonious coexistence within and among the contemporary plural societies.

III. Consolidation of the Alliance of Civilizations and preparation of its fourth forum

18. Under the leadership of United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Jorge Sampaio, the Alliance has now become one of the premier platforms for intercultural and interreligious dialogue within and between diverse societies. Established under the co-sponsorship of Spain and Turkey, the Alliance includes a Group of Friends, whose 128 members include Governments, international organizations, cities, non-governmental organizations, academics, religious figures, corporations, the media and individuals, prominently young people.

19. The Alliance continued to call on its members to develop good governance of cultural diversity through national plans, of which 26 are in existence and more are in preparation, on such themes as education, youth, media and migration. Promising practices were exchanged. Following its experience in South-Eastern Europe, the Alliance adopted a regional strategy on intercultural dialogue and cooperation for the Mediterranean in Malta in November 2010, and the elements of an action plan were put together in consultation with civil society. Work on a regional strategy for Latin America is continuing and will be finalized in 2011.

20. The Alliance prepared for its next annual forum, to be held in Doha from 11 to 13 December. The forum will be a turning point in terms of raising visibility, integrating the global agenda and reinforcing commitments for action. Reflecting the suggestion made by Sheikha Mozah, emphasis will be placed on creating synergies between the objectives of the Alliance and the advancement of the Millennium Development Goals. An initial large-scale exchange with civil society organizations was held in Doha on May 3 and 4.

21. The Alliance also acted as a platform for flexible cooperation, to implement the projects agreed under the second implementation plan and respond to developments affecting intercultural dialogue. The developments include the new context in the Middle East and North Africa region; the ongoing debates in Europe about reconciling diversity and cohesion; and the influence of religion on peace and development. Tensions in the mutual perceptions of the relationship between Islam and the West remained an important topic. The following points should also be mentioned:

(a) In collaboration with Jordan, the Alliance promoted Global Interfaith Harmony Week. It also continued to contribute to the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures;

(b) On World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, the Alliance, with UNESCO and several technology firms, launched the online campaign "Do ONE Thing for Diversity and Inclusion" to invite people worldwide to support cultural diversity and cohesion, in a new form of outreach to large numbers. The Alliance actively promotes the key messages from youth organizations celebrating the International Year of Youth, including peace, human rights and solidarity across generations, cultures, religions and civilizations;

(c) In partnership with BMW, the Alliance launched the World Intercultural Facility for Innovation to support innovative grass-roots projects that enhance cultural understanding. The Youth Solidarity Fund of the Alliance supported

20 grass-roots projects led by youth organizations to advance the objectives of the Alliance, including in conflict and post-conflict areas in Africa and Europe. Having been successfully piloted in 2010, the fellowship programme of the Alliance is exposing a new group of emerging leaders from the Arab world to the diverse realities of Western societies and vice-versa. In April 2011, the Global Youth Movement of the Alliance was launched in Baku to connect youth organizations and leverage their commitment to the objectives of the Alliance. Promising experiences of the Alliance online community "Integration: Building Inclusive Societies" are identified and debated on its website, which benefited from the outreach initiatives of partners in Bogota, London, Rome and Melbourne, Australia. In partnership with the International Organization for Migration, the "Plural+" project continued to attract video entries from around the world on young people's views of diversity;

(d) Attention to narratives, perceptions and the role of the media remained very high. The Global Experts project, which had been created connects journalists with experts throughout the world to provide nuanced analyses, was enhanced. Training courses, notably in the Middle East and South Asia, were provided to journalists and opinion leaders who report on and write about issues relevant to intercultural understanding. The Alliance also organized debates in New York on the Middle East peace process and in Cairo on the political changes in countries in the Middle East and North Africa. A series on religion and the public space was launched in 10 newspapers around the world;

(e) An Alliance summer school, first held in August 2010, brought together hundreds of young people from around the world to acquire knowledge and hone their skills on communicating across cultures. The school is growing and diversifying in 2011. The network of dialogue cafés continued to expand, enabling groups of people around the world to communicate face to face. Impending openings include Ramallah, Tel Aviv, Cairo and Tunis. The Alliance co-sponsored a conference on cross-cultural education, held in Lebanon.

22. After consultation with the Group of Friends, the United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations will present the Third Implementation Plan (2012-13) of the Alliance to the Secretary-General in the third quarter of 2011. He is also taking steps to secure more stable and predictable resources for the Alliance, through the organization of a replenishment conference, to be held in Turkey in October 2011.

IV. Activities of the United Nations system to promote intercultural dialogue

23. In addition to its involvement in the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures and with the Alliance of Civilizations, the United Nations system has continued to undertake a wide range of activities to promote dialogue among cultures. A number of key activities carried out by major United Nations actors in that field are set out below.

Activities led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

24. UNESCO continued its activities related to history, memory and dialogue through the wide dissemination and pedagogical use of its works on general and regional histories, to promote a new and pluralistic approach to the histories of peoples and regions. The collections help to deconstruct prejudices and facilitate mutual understanding. The organization also launched a project for the pedagogical use of the general history of Africa, consistent with its aim to make history teaching instrumental in shaping the identities of peoples in and their understanding of the common ties that lie beneath the cultural diversity of any region, particularly with regard to the African diaspora. The Slave Route project helped to break the silence on slavery and shed light on the global transformations and cultural interactions it generated. In that respect, UNESCO continues to raise global awareness by conducting rigorous scientific research in order to reveal the countless influences generated by forced dialogue between people, cultures and civilizations throughout the world.

25. UNESCO contributed to the celebration of International Day of Nowruz on 21 March (resolution 64/253). Included in 2009 in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, Nowruz stands out as a particularly vibrant component of such heritage and instils a sense of identity and continuity in those who celebrate it.

26. Following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 57/249, in which 21 May was proclaimed World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, UNESCO launched the annual International Festival of Cultural Diversity to highlight the multifaceted and irreplaceable diversity that unites all peoples of the world. The Festival is celebrated at UNESCO headquarters and field offices through an array of cultural events. A wide range of activities are also carried out by local actors. The campaign "Do ONE Thing for Diversity and Inclusion", in partnership with the Alliance, also helps to promote the Day.

27. Within the framework of its cooperation with the Alliance, UNESCO has also developed the intersectoral programme "Intercultural Vademecum" composed of five projects, two of which were launched during World Philosophy Day, celebrated in 2010 on 18 November. The themes of the two projects are "A scientific, philosophical, literary and artistic anthology of Muslim/Arab civilization and its contribution to the revival of Western thought and European Renaissance" and "Arab-Muslim Civilization in the Mirror of the Universal". Both projects are intended to serve as tools for education and media purposes, to present an intercultural vision of history that unites the Muslim/Arab world and the West.

Activities to promote the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding

28. In its resolution 64/134, the General Assembly proclaimed the year commencing on 12 August 2010 the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding, in order to promote dialogue and understanding across generations, cultures, religions and civilizations, and the ideals of peace, respect for human rights and solidarity.

29. The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, the global mechanism of cooperation on matters related to youth development within the United Nations system, developed a framework approach for the International Year. One of the strategic objectives of the framework was to connect and build bridges to increase intercultural understanding among youth. In that context, the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and its focal point on youth organized a wide range of side events and briefing sessions aimed at raising the profile of the issues. For example, in July 2010, the monthly consultations held at United Nations Headquarters examined the ways in which young people could promote dialogue and mutual understanding. A partnership with civil society also led to development of the "Activities kit: a guide to celebrating the International Year of Youth", including practical guidance and concrete examples of activities throughout the International Year and beyond. The preparatory youth event of the Alliance of Civilizations forum held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2010 is another example of that commitment.

30. United Nations agencies have used the International Year as an opportunity to undertake activities aimed at young people. For example, FAO conducted workshops for children and young people on biodiversity and training courses on the Millennium Development Goals in relation to Alliance activities for youth. It also developed the World Youth Award, a self-development programme for young people that addresses issues related to the Goals and to international citizenship. The award is scheduled to be launched in August 2011 at the World Scout Jamboree in Sweden.

31. The Department of Information produced communication materials for the Year, with the slogan "Our Year, Our Voice". Through proactive outreach initiatives, the Department's network of United Nations information centres mobilized local youth to promote the Year through a variety of activities, including sports, video competitions and poster exhibitions.

Activities related to recognition of indigenous cultures

32. The secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues undertakes activities to promote intercultural dialogue relating to indigenous issues and rights. As part of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People, observed on 9 August, a special event was organized in honour of indigenous film-makers for their exceptional work in raising sensitivity and awareness about the culture, history and everyday life of indigenous peoples around the world.

33. In order to address the capacity-building needs of Governments, agencies and indigenous peoples at all levels, the secretariat of the Permanent Forum has organized training courses on indigenous issues in a number of countries, including Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Cambodia, Ecuador, Guyana, Nepal and the Philippines. A resource kit on indigenous issues was created to focus on development and indigenous peoples, with an emphasis on cultural diversity, identity and rights. The kit is designed to guide United Nations country teams on ways to engage indigenous peoples and include their perspectives in development processes, including in preparing common country assessments, United Nations development assistance frameworks, poverty reduction strategy papers and reports on the Goals.

34. Other United Nations system entities have increased their work related to indigenous issues. For example, in 2010, FAO adopted a corporate policy on indigenous and tribal peoples and developed a programme on globally important agricultural heritage systems, which aims to reinforce the underlying ecological and sociocultural processes that have sustained valuable traditional agricultural systems from around the world and to empower and conserve smallholder communities, many of which are indigenous. FAO also documents indigenous food systems around the world and formulates health interventions based on reviving local social and cultural systems.

35. Similarly, IFAD promotes systematic intercultural dialogue with representatives of national and local indigenous peoples' organizations and, in 2011, established an indigenous peoples' forum, which will be held in Rome every other year, in conjunction with the IFAD Governing Council.

36. In the context of its activities to advance the rights of indigenous peoples, UNICEF took initiatives on such themes as bilingual and intercultural education, culturally sensitive health services, birth registration and ending violence, abuse and exploitation. The UNICEF regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean has a particularly long-standing engagement in activities aimed at generating strategic information, empowering indigenous peoples, mainly women and adolescents, and building local capacities.

Communication activities by Department of Public Information

37. Communication and outreach are key aspects of the work of the United Nations on intercultural dialogue. Through UN Radio, UN Television, the *United Nations Chronicle*, the United Nations News Centre and the Organization's website, the Department of Public Information covers a wide range of events organized to strengthen the Organization's voice on intercultural dialogue, in particular during the international days and global weeks proclaimed by the General Assembly. Web pages have been created in the six official languages of the United Nations for many of the events.

38. The 2011 theme of the Department's annual media seminar on peace in the Middle East, held in Budapest on 12 and 13 July 2011, was "Prospects for peace: understanding current changes and overcoming obstacles". Participants in the seminar reviewed the current status of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and examined the role played by the creative community, including writers, musicians and film-makers, in fostering conditions for dialogue and better understanding between Israelis and Palestinians.

39. Reconciliation and education was the focus of the 2011 commemoration of the Rwanda genocide, which was observed with a series of events organized during the week of 4 April 2011 at United Nations Headquarters and at United Nations information centres around the world. In addition to a memorial ceremony and a student conference, an exhibition entitled "Lessons from Rwanda" was displayed in Kigali, Bujumbura, Geneva and Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania.

40. The Department of Public Information continues to engage civil society on related issues, through special briefings for non-governmental organizations and students, including on such themes as: "Promoting diversity of world cultures and

the links that unite them", held in October 2010 in observance of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures; "Focus on faith series: unveiling Judaism and its place in the dialogue among civilizations", held in November 2010; and "Speak up, stop discrimination: exploring human rights in the relationship between the Muslim world and the West", held in observance of Human Rights Day.

41. On 5 May 2011, the Department organized a symposium on the theme "Can literature effect change?", with a panel of eminent Indian authors and poets. The United Nations News Centre also published a feature based on an interview with writer and United Nations Messenger of Peace Paulo Coelho on the theme of intercultural dialogue.

Activities carried out by the Department of Political Affairs

42. During the reporting period, the efforts of the Department of Political Affairs on preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and post-conflict peacebuilding, continued to catalyse and support dialogue across societal cleavages, in order to reduce, manage and resolve violent conflict. The Department pursued such efforts where it had been explicitly mandated by the Security Council to promote and support an environment of dialogue, for example, in Burundi in the run-up to the mid-2010 electoral cycle, or in cases of crisis mediation, for example, in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, where both the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and the Department's Mediation Support Unit played important roles.

43. The Department of Political Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme have continued their successful partnership to promote longer-term dialogue within the Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention, which focuses on early engagement in order to build national infrastructures of peace as well as attitudes, aptitudes and platforms for dialogue across societal cleavages before violent conflict emerges or re-emerges. The Programme has provided support to build local or national dialogue mechanisms to such countries as Fiji, Ghana, Guyana, Lesotho, Kenya, Maldives, Mauritania and Togo. The Mediation Support Unit has provided additional expertise to the dialogue processes in a number of those countries.

V. Promoting interreligious dialogue through cooperation with faith-based organizations

44. The United Nations system also contributes to promoting interreligious dialogue by engaging with faith-based organizations and involving them in its policy and advocacy activities. Such initiatives bring together peoples of different faiths to discuss common issues and United Nations development objectives.

United Nations Population Fund

45. UNFPA strengthens advocacy, knowledge management and capacity-building with faith-based organizations and members of its Global Interfaith Network for Population and Development. The Fund continues to chair the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Organizations for the

Millennium Development Goals. Under the aegis of that partnership, UNFPA and the United Nations System Staff College will co-facilitate a strategic learning exchange for United Nations staff on faith, development and partnerships. The Fund regularly convenes consultations between United Nations entities, academia and faith-based organizations on the themes of religion, development and peacebuilding. It also co-sponsored the World Young Women's Christian Association's International Women's Summit, held in July 2011.

46. The Fund developed regional strategies for engaging with faith-based organizations for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, in consultation with national partners, including Governments and civil society.

47. UNFPA Africa supports national authorities in partnering with religious and traditional organizations to launch at the national level the Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa, an initiative of the African Union Commission supported by UNFPA to intensify implementation of the Maputo Plan of Action to reduce maternal mortality. Five additional countries (Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Liberia and United Republic of Tanzania) launched the campaign in 2011, bringing the total to 31.

48. At the country level, UNFPA Thailand provided technical assistance to the Asia Muslim Action Network concerning Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), to bridge religious and cultural gaps. Research was conducted in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam, on sociocultural determinants of sexual and reproductive health among migrant women, resulting in recommendations for culturally sensitive policies and services.

49. UNFPA Tajikistan supported the establishment of a religious affairs committee to raise awareness among religious leaders of HIV, reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections and gender issues. UNFPA conducted training courses for religious leaders from all provinces and pioneered a train-the-trainer process linking Islamic precepts with health priorities, a good practice that has been adopted by development counterparts. UNFPA Turkey continued its partnership with different ministries to train religious leaders in ways of dealing with cases involving violence against women. A train-the-trainer course was conducted in May 2010, with the participation of 40 religious leaders; nearly 4,000 religious leaders working in the field were reached. The aim in 2011 is to reach 12,000.

50. During the reporting period, UNFPA Georgia supported youth summer camps aimed at transforming cultural, ethnic and religious diversity into youth assets. Other initiatives included a dialogue with more than 45 different ethnic and religious organizations on the theme of domestic violence, and a humanitarian assistance programme with the Georgian Orthodox Church on the prevention and management of sexual and gender-based violence and on responding to the reproductive health needs of internally displaced persons. UNFPA Georgia also partnered with the Patriarchate of Georgia to provide assistance and family dignity kits to more than 2,000 families, covering 8,000 internally displaced persons.

51. UNFPA Kyrgyzstan conducted training courses to promote sexual and reproductive health, family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention along Islamic lines. After the inter-ethnic conflict that devastated communities in the south of Kyrgyzstan, faith-based organizations were involved in implementing a United Nations flash appeal, bringing communities together and successfully addressing

gender-based violence in conservative contexts, for example, through community-based theatres.

52. UNFPA Latin America and the Caribbean supports programmes with regional faith-based organizations on the prevention of gender based violence, HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care, on working against stigma and discrimination and on the promotion of Goal 5 of the Millennium Development Goals.

53. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, UNFPA established a national forum of faith-based organizations to partner with UNFPA, a successful partnership model for achieving the reproductive health-related Goals that has been replicated in Colombia and Mexico. Also during the reporting period, UNFPA Guyana engaged diverse faith-based organizations to establish youth-friendly spaces in which to address sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence. The success of that initiative led to a request from the Guyana Anglican Diocese for support to be provided to the Anglican National Youth Council and the Brotherhood of St. Andrew in their observation of the International Year of the Family.

54. The partnerships provided a space for dialogue between UNFPA, faith-based organizations and Governments to tackle sensitive issues using a culturally sensitive rights-based approach. UNFPA acknowledges the diversity of faith-inspired organizations and mobilization, promotes multi-faith and intercultural partnerships, advocates engagement with faith-based communities as a means of building coherent partnerships between the United Nations system and civil society on human rights mandates, and recommends that such partnerships be systematically monitored and evaluated along agreed principles and across the United Nations system.

United Nations Children's Fund

55. During the reporting period, UNICEF made significant progress in its work with multireligious structures and religious communities to promote the rights of children. The unique moral authority and extensive networks of religious communities makes them critical partners in UNICEF programmes that target the most disadvantaged children and families. In 2011, UNICEF will publish a guide for working with religious communities aimed at UNICEF staff and other advocates of children's rights, providing concrete strategies for effective engagement and examples relating to key areas of work, such as child protection, education, health, nutrition, water and sanitation and HIV/AIDS.

56. As part of a multi-year partnership to strengthen the capacity of religious communities, particularly interreligious mechanisms, as a means of protecting children affected by conflict, UNICEF and Religions for Peace organized a high-level round-table meeting in New York in November 2010, during which concrete commitments were made to address violence against children. The resulting publication, entitled "From Commitment to Action: What Religious Communities can do to Eliminate Violence against Children", was translated into French, Japanese and Spanish, and distributed to UNICEF country offices, and Religions for Peace affiliates and relevant external partners.

57. In 2010, 19 UNICEF country offices participated in the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children initiative, which mobilized religious leaders around a

common agenda for maternal health and child survival, with a focus on exclusive breastfeeding. In Algeria, sermons were given in the country's 15,000 mosques on children's rights and the importance of breastfeeding. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, four of the main religious groups, which have a combined network of nearly 30 million people, led week-long campaigns on the importance of key family health practices, such as breastfeeding and immunization. In Nepal, multireligious coordinated activities, including weekly religious services, focused on maternal and child health. In 2011-2013, the focus of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children initiative will be on eliminating violence against children.

58. UNICEF country programmes continued to work with multireligious structures and religious communities to promote the rights of children. Examples of country office activities included:

(a) In India, more than 400 religious leaders from around the country met near the southern city of Bangalore to address stigma and discrimination linked to HIV and AIDS;

(b) In Angola, the Ministry for Women and Family led an alliance of nine religious organizations to promote 12 key family competencies to keep children alive, healthy and well;

(c) In Nicaragua, an alliance between the Theological and Social Research Centre and the non-governmental organization Acción Medica Cristiana to promote theological-pastoral reflexion on the HIV epidemic succeeded in mobilizing churches on the rights of people living with HIV;

(d) In Kenya, UNICEF, together with the Kenya Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation and the Interreligious Council of Kenya, launched an initiative with Christian, Muslim and Hindu religious leaders to promote key high-impact interventions for maternal and child health within their respective religious communities.

Celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week

59. In its resolution 65/5, the General Assembly proclaimed the first week of February every year to be World Interfaith Harmony Week between all religions, faiths and beliefs, following an initiative by Jordan. The first celebration of the Week was marked by over 200 events in 40 countries, (see http://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com).

60. The United Nations observed the Week by holding events such as an interfaith breakfast, organized by Department of Public Information with the Committee of Religious Non-governmental Organizations at the United Nations; a special event on the role of faith-based organizations and interfaith initiatives in development, reconciliation and peacebuilding, organized by the Office of the Permanent Observer for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, with the participation of several United Nations entities; and a film screening in partnership with the Alliance of Civilizations.

61. At the launch of the Week, the Secretary-General delivered a message in which he echoed the call by the General Assembly for places of worship to spread the message of harmony, peace and goodwill between religions.

62. In addition, a special event was organized on 16 May 2011 by the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations to commemorate the International Day of Vesak, 2,600 years of Buddhism, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/115. An interfaith dialogue on peace, harmony and coexistence was held at United Nations Headquarters, with close to 20 speakers representing various Buddhist organizations from different countries and leaders of other religious traditions.

VI. A rights-based approach to dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions

63. General Assembly resolution 65/138 on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, and earlier resolutions on the same issue, contain specific provisions on human rights and non-discrimination and on a rights-based approach to intercultural and interreligious dialogue. A number of United Nations entities have carried out activities that directly contribute to the implementation of those resolutions.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

64. During the seventeenth session of the Human Rights Council, held from 30 May to 17 June 2011, OHCHR organized a panel discussion on strengthened international efforts to foster a global dialogue for the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels, based on respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs, pursuant to paragraph 9 of Human Rights Council resolution 16/18, entitled "Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief". The discussion focused on the effective implementation of measures and practical actions to promote a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels.

65. For 2011, OHCHR has organized four expert workshops, in the various regions of the world, on the issue of freedom of expression and the prohibition of incitement to national, racial or religious hatred as reflected in articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In doing so, OHCHR aims at conducting a comprehensive assessment of the global state of implementation of the international obligation to prohibit incitement to national, racial or religious hatred, while fully respecting freedom of expression, and to subsequently assist in devising actions at all levels.

66. In October 2011, as part of the International Year for People of African Descent, OHCHR will launch a pilot fellowship programme for people of African descent. The fellowship programme will enable participants to enhance their understanding of the United Nations human rights system and share experiences from different countries and regions.

67. Regarding the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, the High Commissioner submitted an annual report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/16/39) that highlights the efforts being made by

OHCHR and the United Nations human rights machinery to strengthen the implementation of the 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

68. In order to advance understanding of the Declaration and encourage protection of the rights of minorities, OHCHR organizes consultations, seminars and workshops that provide an opportunity to examine how minorities can take part in civil and political life while maintaining their cultural and religious identities. Also, OHCHR has launched a series of regional consultations with a view to encouraging the participation of minorities in the administration of justice through law enforcement, in particular policing. Those consultations make it possible for participants to share experiences while focusing on practices that have proved to be successful. The good practices are those that secure the representation and participation of minorities in policing while safeguarding the cultural and religious identity of minorities. The fourth such consultation was held in Bangkok in May 2011.

69. OHCHR cooperated with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to encourage the inclusion of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the organization's negotiations on its text on traditional knowledge, genetic resources and traditional cultural expressions.

70. Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 15/7, OHCHR is organizing a panel discussion on the role of languages and culture in the promotion and protection of the well-being and identity of indigenous peoples, to be held during the eighteenth session of the Human Rights Council.

United Nations Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council

71. In his interim report to the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly (A/66/156), the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief focuses on the role of the State in promoting interreligious communication. The Special Rapporteur emphasizes that communication and public debate constitute a crucial element for human rights to become a reality. He points to a number of possibilities for States, including by encouraging interreligious communication by publicly expressing their appreciation for well-defined dialogue projects; providing financial subsidies to existing or newly created projects; facilitating dialogue between members of various religious or belief groups in the framework of the State itself; and developing forums for regular encounters of people of different religious or belief affiliations.

72. In 2011, the independent expert in the field of cultural rights submitted a report (A/HRC/17/38) to the Human Rights Council on the right of access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage. The report underlines the need for intercultural dialogue on cultural heritage, for peacebuilding processes to include the repair of cultural heritage with the participation of all concerned and for the promotion of intercultural dialogue regarding cultural heritage. The independent expert noted that dialogue is important when conflicts of interpretation about the meaning and significance of cultural heritage arise. She also noted that the preservation/safeguarding of cultural heritage should aim at ensuring human development, the building of peaceful and democratic societies and the promotion of cultural diversity. In particular, she recommended that States recognize and value the diversity of cultural heritages present in their territories and under their jurisdiction,

and acknowledge, respect and protect the possible diverging interpretations that may arise over cultural heritage.

VII. Outcome of the consultations on the proposal for a decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue

73. In its resolution of 63/22, the General Assembly requested the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to coordinate with UNESCO in facilitating consideration of the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace. Such a decade was originally proposed by interfaith, faith-based and value-based non-governmental organizations that created a coalition in favour of the initiative and held a series of consultations at the United Nations and elsewhere (see www.faithdecadeforpeace.net).

74. In 2009, in order to comply with that mandate, the Secretariat, in coordination with UNESCO, carried out consultations in order to gather views from various relevant actors and better assess the potential added value of such a decade and the difficulties that the process might generate. The outcome of the consultations is contained in the report of the Secretary-General on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (A/64/325, paras. 88-104).

75. The consultation process revealed that while several Member States welcomed the initiative as an opportunity to enhance dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions, concerns were expressed as to the content of the initiative, the context and process through which the idea was developed, its effectiveness, and the costs involved. The above-mentioned report concluded that further consultations would be needed before a broad and consensual mobilization on the proposal could be reached at the intergovernmental level. The report also drew the attention of the Assembly to the need to ensure coherence and coordination of the multiplicity of initiatives taken on intercultural, interreligious and intercivilizational matters and to closely liaise with UNESCO.

76. In its resolution 64/81, the Assembly did not take any action on the proposed decade and requested the Secretary-General, in coordination with UNESCO, to further solicit views of Member States on the matter and to reporting to it at its sixty-sixth session, building on the information contained in the reports of the Secretary-General at its sixty-fourth and sixty-fifth sessions and the relevant initiatives taken in the course of 2010. In its resolution 65/138, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its sixty-sixth session, building on the information contained in the same reports and the relevant initiatives taken in the course of 2011.

77. A note verbale dated 4 March 2011 and a reminder dated 9 June 2011 were sent to Member States on the matter. At the time of reporting, the Secretariat had received responses, summarized below, from Albania, Chile, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Togo and the European Union.

78. Albania, Chile, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines and Togo expressed support for

proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue and cooperation for peace. They considered that such an initiative would make a positive contribution to improving understanding and cooperation between the nations and peoples of diverse cultures. Some States also mentioned the relevance of the initiative with respect to peace and peacebuilding activities that the Organization strives to promote.

79. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia underlined the connection between the proposed decade and activities carried out on the same topic as part of the First and Second World Conferences on Interreligious and Intercivilization Dialogue, organized by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Pakistan was of the view that the decade would strengthen the United Nations in its role to ensure respect for and the promotion of multiculturalism and to protect peace and harmony among different societies and nations.

80. The Philippines stressed that the proclamation of such a decade could be used to highlight in a sustained manner the various interreligious and intercultural dialogue initiatives held at the United Nations, in order to bring existing programmes in that field under one ambit and to draw in more stakeholders, including women, youth and civil society organizations. In that context, it was suggested that UNESCO should play a guiding role by formulating a programme of activities for the decade in consultation with Member States.

81. Togo suggested that the proclamation of the decade should be followed by the adoption of national action plans aimed at strengthening dialogue among religions and cultures. Togo also proposed the proclamation of an international day for intercultural and interfaith dialogue, to ensure a continuing commitment on the issue.

82. The European Union raised a number of concerns about the initiative. It underlined that the United Nations system and Member States could play a facilitating role in the field of intercultural and interreligious dialogue and promote the necessary conditions for that dialogue to take place, but that they should not lead such dialogue given the fact that both interreligious and intrareligious dialogue primarily took place between individuals and religious organizations and leaders. In addition, the European Union stressed that interreligious dialogue was only one of the various dimensions of intercultural dialogue and that the aim of the involvement of the United Nations should be to promote intercultural dialogue as a whole, including its religious dimension. Hence, the European Union did not believe that the proposed decade would contribute significantly to a genuine dialogue.

83. The European Union stated its opposition in principle to new international days, years or decades, given their questionable effectiveness, and stressed that the proposed decade should be carefully assessed against the background of other ongoing initiatives, including the outcome of and lessons learned from the proclamation of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures. For those reasons, the European Union concluded that that it currently did not see the added value of proclaiming the decade.

84. The consultations carried out by the Secretariat have led to a limited expression of interest for the proposed decade. Only 10 responses were received, including 1 from a group of countries that raised serious concerns as to the added

value of the initiative. It is therefore unlikely that the General Assembly can take a decision on the proposal in the near future. Instead, and in order to ensure coherence in the work of the United Nations system in this field, the Assembly may wish to consider future possible celebrations in connection with initiatives taken by the governing bodies of UNESCO, including in the follow-up to the International Decade for a Culture and Peace.

VIII. Conclusion

85. The present report testifies to the diversity of activities carried out by many actors in the United Nations system to offer concrete support for dialogue among cultures, religions and civilizations and to implement the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in those fields.

86. The increased involvement of Member States in this area of work is also to be noted, as exemplified by the leading role played by several of them in proposing the proclamation of international days or weeks and organizing celebration activities, such as the Global Interfaith Harmony Week. Other far-reaching projects initiated by Member States include the "Foundations of a long-term strategy for global sustainable development based on partnership of civilizations", initiated by the Pitirim Sorokin-Nikolai Kondratieff International Institute and presented to the United Nations by the Permanent Missions of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation to the United Nations.

87. The high number of interconnected dialogue initiatives being carried out raises the issue of the scope of the present report. In that respect, the Assembly may wish to explore possibilities for harmonizing the reporting of all issues that deal with intercultural, interreligious and intercivilizational dialogue as well as a culture of peace, cultural diversity, tolerance, mutual understanding and rapprochement of cultures, so as to strengthen policy coherence. The Assembly may also wish to request that future reports focus on the specific dimensions of such dialogue, with a change in focus every year, and to address the ways such dialogue can contribute to peace, development or human rights.